

Right choice, wrong way

Head football coach deserved more respect from Gates, Texas A&M



Talking Points
Dallas Shipp

Texas A&M President Dr. Robert M. Gates released a statement Monday announcing he had "reassigned" A&M football coach R.C. Slocum, relieving him of his head coaching duties.

No press conference was announced, he gave the media no access for questions and no answers as to why he did a 180-degree turn concerning his support for Slocum. Slocum was bound to be fired after the season finish by the Aggies, but this was not the way he should have been treated after serving A&M for 30 years, the last 14 of which as head football coach.

Gates should not have released a statement that he would wait for the athletic director to fire Slocum in the first place if he thought there was any chance he would have to make the move himself. Director of University Relations Cynthia Lawson said Monday night that things had changed since that statement and Gates didn't feel it was fair to the new athletic director to force him to make the move right after assuming his new position as athletic director.

It isn't fair to Slocum to claim full support one day and less than a month later give him the boot.

Full support means just that: full support. If the situation changed, Gates should have supported Slocum through those changes.

Whether Slocum should have been fired is not the issue. Slocum has led A&M to a bowl game in 11 of his previous 14 seasons and was bowl eligible again this season. He is also the sixth winningest active Division I coach, has more wins at A&M than any other coach in school history and has never had a losing season in his 13-year career at A&M.

However, what he hasn't done is deliver a national championship and with the quick successes of Bob Stoops at Oklahoma and Tyrone Willingham at Notre Dame, the heat is on coaches across the nation and Slocum was just the latest one to be fired.

While this was a disappointing season for all of those involved in the football program, no one has expressed more disappointment than Slocum, who said he could not wait to get back to work and fix the problems the Aggies had this season.

"We had a season where we lost several close games that could have gone either way and no one was more disappointed than me with our record," Slocum said. "Although disappointed with Dr. Gates' decision, I do recognize that the university has the right to decide who coaches the team."

Gates understandably has been under enormous pressure from alumni and donors to do something soon to

keep the damage to the football program to a minimum, especially in recruiting.

But Slocum has done too much for A&M to be treated in this manner. He has been an excellent example of how to run a program with class and dignity, even following his dismissal on Monday.

Assistant Athletic Director for Media Relations Alan Cannon said Monday that Slocum was adamant that he wanted to be the person that told his players the news. In that meeting, Slocum told the team that it is not the bad things that happen in life, but how you handle them.

Slocum handled himself with dignity and grace like he always has.

It seems the only reason Gates

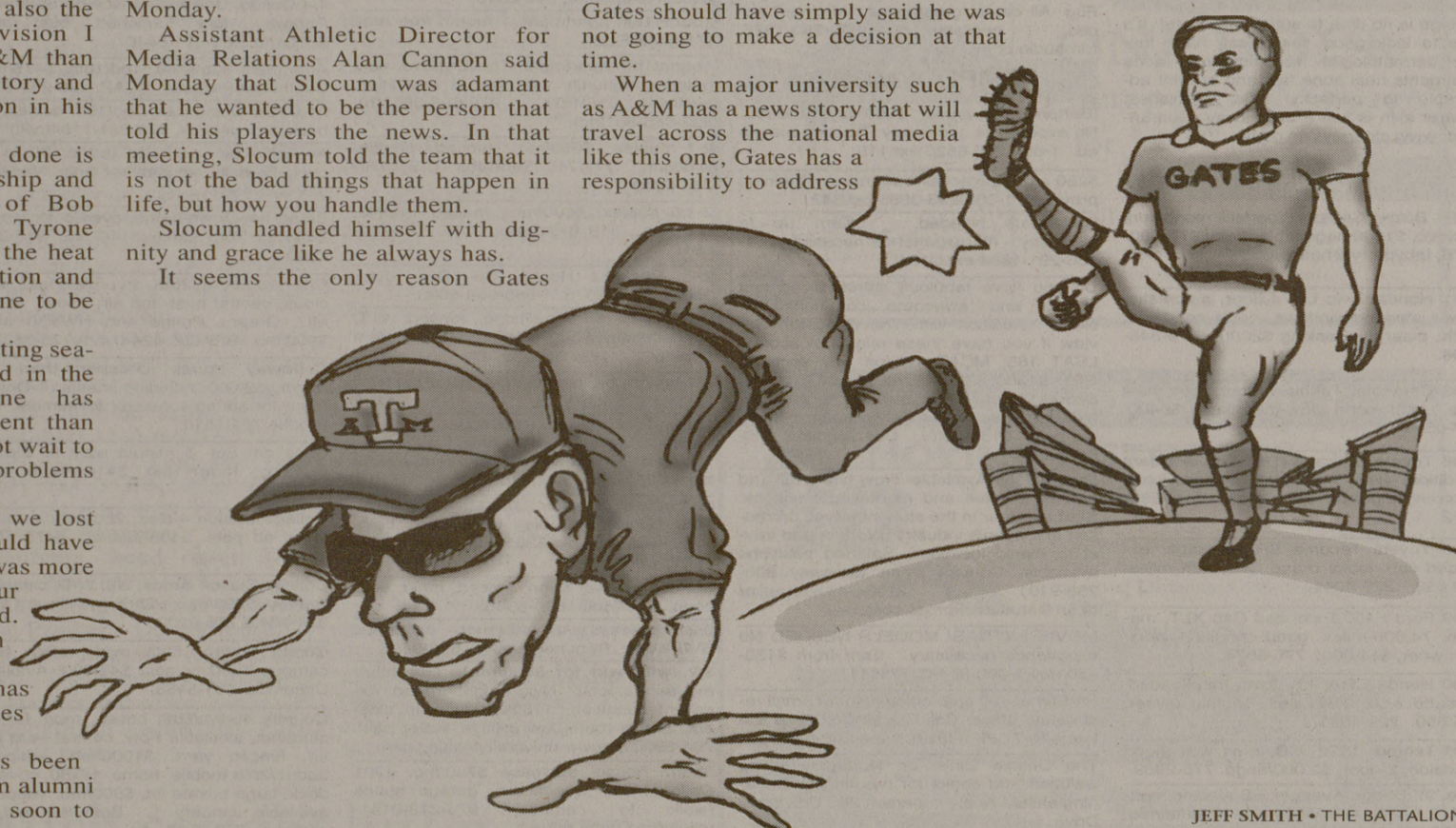
made a statement at all last month was to get the media and alumni to cease the incredible volume of phone calls and e-mails that flooded his office following the loss to Oklahoma State.

If he needed to release a statement, he should not have said that it would be up to the new athletic director. Gates should have simply said he was not going to make a decision at that time.

When a major university such as A&M has a news story that will travel across the national media like this one, Gates has a responsibility to address

the public, especially when it was his decision to bring down the ax on Slocum.

Gates makes \$300,000 a year and owes the public his time to answer questions about arguably his biggest decision yet as A&M's president.



JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

Aggies take care of business

By True Brown
THE BATTALION

Antoine Wright scored 21 points as the Texas A&M men's basketball team came from six points down late in the second half to upend Oakland 71-65 at Reed Arena.

Wright, who had 16 first-half points, scored five during the last 4:37 of the game, including two free throws that put the Aggies (3-1) in front for the first time since the 11:25 mark.

"It was obvious they were going to try and get a guy to stay on me the whole second half," Wright said. "I expected them to do it, so I had to relax a little bit and tried to control myself."

Wright blistered the Grizzlies' defense early and often in the opening half, prompting coach Greg Kampe to switch his team from a zone defense to a man-to-man scheme.

"We had the classic upset going," Kampe said. "We think we know what you

have to do to win in a place like this. Our man defense was outstanding."

Oakland's plan to play Wright with tight defense worked for most of the second half. Wright was held scoreless early and the Grizzlies chipped away at an 11-point A&M lead.

Oakland (2-2) went on an 11-4 run and eventually took their first lead of the half after a basket by guard Mike Helms. Helms led all scorers with 31 points after a 13-of-21 shooting performance.

"The last three minutes of the first half were big for us," Kampe said. "At the five minute mark, we wanted a chance to win this thing and we were up four or five at that point."

Oakland's bid at a win was almost successful.

The Aggies put the Grizzlies on the foul line 17 times in the second half, but Oakland managed to make just nine of its free throws. For the game, the Grizzlies made a lowly 52.2 percent of their foul shots.

"They fouled the right guy in Jordan (Sabourin)," Kampe said. "He isn't a very good free throw shooter. But then we got him out and (Shawn) Hopes, who's a freshman, missed one and Helms missed one with 14 seconds to go."

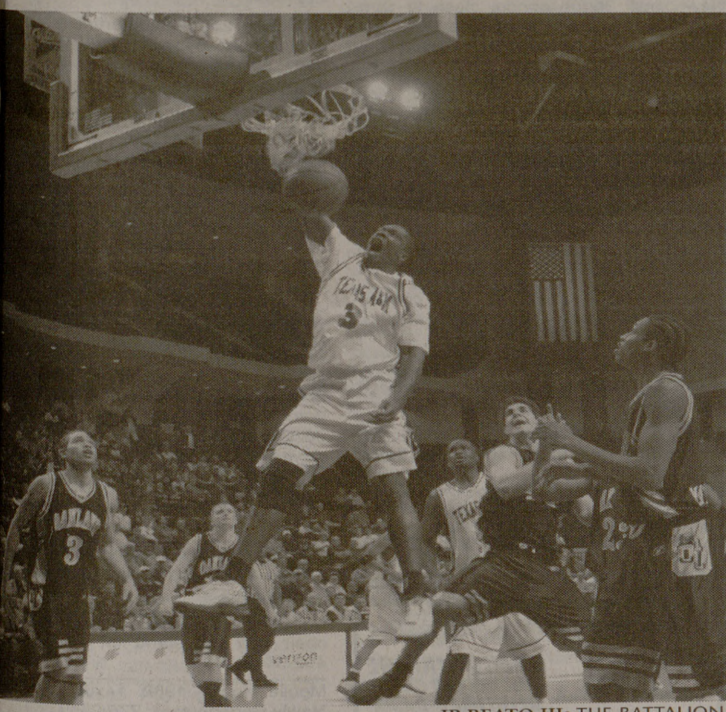
Helms' miss would have cut the Aggies lead to one and allowed Oakland the freedom to put A&M on the line and still have a chance to tie.

A few seconds later, A&M guard Bradley Jackson extended A&M's lead to four after connecting on two free throws.

Junior forward Jesse King finished the game off with an emphatic two handed reverse jam after a steal at midcourt.

After trading the lead seven times in the last four minutes of the game, guard Bernard King put the Aggies in front by three with 31 seconds left after getting fouled on a spinning, twisting left-handed layup.

See **Basketball** on page 7



JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Junior forward Jesse King reacts after dunking the ball over the Oakland defense Monday night at Reed Arena. The Aggies won the game 71-65.

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